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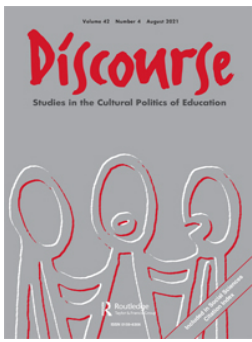
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Sensing and configuring the world with text: bringing neo-Vygotskian thinking into dialogue with more-than-human literacies in early childhood

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ABSTRACT

Research framed by evolving sociocultural theories have been fundamental in advancing the study of early childhood literacies. More recently the field has been enriched by posthumanist theories that have shifted the analytic gaze from children's participation in literacy practices and events, to the fluid relationality of literacies. Concurrently, neo-Vygotskian scholars have advanced cultural-historical concepts to study a child and their environment in unity. This paper brings neo-Vygotskian thinking into dialogue with 'more-than-human' literacies in early childhood. Drawing on vignettes generated from an ethnography involving 3–4-year-old children, the paper explores the in-between-ness of young children and the socio-material environment during encounters with text, to seek insights into the emerging idiosyncratic, subjectively, and relationally produced experiences. From this conceptual space, the paper considers the ways in which children's intention and orientation emerge with text and how micromoments in relations can be sites of potential transformation.

KEYWORDS

Literacy studies; perezhivanie; subjectivity; early childhood; relationality; more-than-human literacies

Introduction and background

During the last four decades, early childhood literacy has developed as a distinct and vibrant field of study that transcends conventional views of what constitutes reading and writing. Until recently, these expansive views have largely been generated by scholars working with socio-cultural theories and conceiving literacy and literacy learning as socially constructed, something that happens 'between people', shaped by cultural, historical, political and economic factors (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1995). The body of work in the field of 'New Literacy Studies' has elucidated how literacy learning is not simply an individual cognitive process or an accumulation of skills that can be universally applied (Street, 1995). Rather, 'children learn to read and write from the vantage point of the social positions they occupy and the types of participation that those roles afford' (Rowe, 2010, p. 137). Whilst a skill-based model still

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tends to dominate in educational policy and curricula across the UK and internationally, sociocultural theories instigated a shift in literacy research agendas, redirecting the analytic lens to children's participation in the distinct and multiple literacy practices associated with different domains of life and with evolving technologies (Larson & Marsh, 2015). The term 'literacies' is now commonplace in scholarly work, recognising that texts, and peoples' engagement with them vary greatly. As Gee (2015) states, 'People do not just read and write texts; they do things with them' (p. 36).

More-than-human literacies

More recently literacy research has been enriched by a turn to posthumanist and new materialist theories (e.g. Hackett & Somerville, 2017; Kuby, 2017; Pahl, 2014; Taylor & Hughes, 2016; Thiel, 2015), and socio-materialist perspectives (e.g. Burnett & Merchant, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; Burnett, Merchant, & Neumann, 2020). Posthumanism comprises a collection of theories, yet posthumanist scholars share 'a commitment to reconceptualizing human beings as 'more-than-human' collectivities', highlighting 'how human beings never act alone and are always entangled with/in their environments' (Dernikos, Ferguson, & Siegel, 2019, p. 3). This body of work has challenged literacy scholars to rethink the complexities of people – material – text – place – time relations, evoking nuanced and layered accounts of literacies. Posthumanist thinking has both extended and problematised socio-cultural views of literacy as socially and culturally situated. Kuby and Rowsell (2017) write, 'Posthumanism is rooted in a relational ontology' (p. 288), arguing that posthumanist theories cannot easily be applied to more conventional humanist research, rather posthumanism is a paradigm shift. More recently, responding to the argument that this body of work both 'lacks transformative power' (Hackett, MacLure, & Pahl, 2020, p. 4) and have not fully attended to issues of power, race and racism (Thiel & Dernikos, 2020), posthumanist literacy scholars have considered how these theories might address issues of inequality and injustice in early literacy education. For example, Dernikos (2020) discusses the ways white supremacy is subtly embedded in a primary classroom through an orchestration of bodies and sounds, and Burnett et al. (2020) explore how classroom arrangements and relations of bodies and things can sustain or disrupt deficit perspectives of young children's language and literacies. In a similar vein, Hackett, MacLure, and McMahon (2020) disrupt notions of 'what counts' as language in Early Childhood Policy, offering a fresh understanding of language as multi-sensory, expressive events.

In the same era, through posthumanist 'affect' theories, scholars have delved into the embodied nature of young children's literacies and meaning making. Affect can be conceptualised as a bodily response to stimuli prior to cognitive registering or processing (Massumi, 2015, 2002; Mulcahy, 2012), or as Ehret (2017) proposes, affect is firstly a 'pre-personal intensity' (p. 101). Thiel and Dernikos (2020) describe affect as visceral and non-conscious, fluidly emerging within and between human and nonhuman bodies. From this perspective, young children's encounters with texts and literacies necessarily involve their capacity to affect and be affected, at some level of intensity, in the atmosphere of the socio-material environment. Focusing on the relation between text and affect, Burnett and Merchant (2020a) prompt us to rethink 'meaning', how it emerges and the ways in which text participates. As Ehret and D'Amico (2019) suggest, posthuman perspectives of affect may in fact bring us closer to knowing human expression.

Bringing neo-Vygotskian thinking into dialogue with more-than-human literacies

Focusing on early childhood literacies, this paper picks up this desire to know the experiences of the individual human child; it does so by bringing posthumanist perspectives of early childhood literacies into dialogue with neo-Vygotskian thinking. Based on an ethnography involving 3- to 4-year-old children in England, it redirects the analytic lens to the very personal, all-too-human experiences of young children, not distinct from, but in the relational micromoments that emerge between the child, social others, texts and materials, and space and time in a literacy event.

Specifically, I draw on contemporary readings of Vygotsky's (1994) concept of *perezhi-vanie*, to consider how young children's encounters with texts unfold in dynamic relations in a sociocultural, political, material context, with a particular focus on how multiple children 'live through' the relationality of a literacy event differently and uniquely. The paper then considers how the emerging relationality orientates children's activity, intention and experience. Whilst neo-Vygotskian and posthumanist perspectives emerge from distinct ontologies, the body of scholarly work in each sphere frequently shares a common goal of challenging dominant views of literacy in educational policy, which firstly, tend to be anchored in white middle class histories and secondly, reduce literacy to attainment data.

Rethinking practices and events

The concept of literacy practices and events has been a central and enduring tenet in sociocultural literacy scholarship (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2015; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995). Over three decades, this idea has provided the strongest challenge to the view that literacy is simply a set of skills, exemplifying that literacies exist, and are learnt, in a social context (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

Yet, cultural historical scholars have long argued that there is a distinction to be made between understanding cultural practices as 'socially shaped' and as 'socially determined'. Dreier (1999) noted that participation in social practices is diverse; individuals participate differently, taking up different roles and positions. Dreier argues that if participation in social practices accounted for human development, societies would influence members in a similar manner, generating fairly uniform individuals. Similarly, Leontiev (1978) challenged the view that the environment's influence on a person's development could be simply conceived of as 'stimulus – response'; he proposed that, 'no development directly comes from what comprises only the prerequisites necessary for it' (p. 105). By extending the unit of analysis beyond practices and events, to capture the dynamic relations between, or 'unity' of child and environment, more textured and child specific insights into human activity can surface (Hedegaard, 2012). In this way, research is able to simultaneously challenge both universal views of literacy development and social determinism.

A contemporary, socio-material model of accounting for relationality in the literacy event has been previously presented by Burnett and Merchant (2020b) who propose, 'literacy-as-event' as a heuristic for thinking about the fluidity and unpredictability of an 'event'. Drawing on poststructuralist thinking (including Bourassa,

2002; Masumi, 2002, 2015), the authors reconsider and critique conceptualisations of a literacy event as bounded in and by a particular time and place, rather, they propose conceptualising, 'literacy as an affective encounter generated through an ongoing reassembling of the human and the more-than-human' (Burnett & Merchant, 2020b, p. 48).

From this theoretical position, Burnett and Merchant (2020b) set out three related propositions:

(1) event is generated as people and things come into relation; (2) what happens always exceeds what can be conceived and perceived; and (3), implicit in the event are multiple potentialities, including multiple possibilities for what might materialise as well as what does not. (p. 49)

These propositions encourage us to ponder what happens in-between humans and materials moment-by-moment, and to consider the ways in which these happenings affect one's meaning making, thoughts and feelings, interactions, relationships and so forth. Hence, Burnett and Merchant's (2020b) paper offers a model to consider how pedagogic interactions in the classroom could be differently conceptualised, encouraging a shift in attention from participation to relationality.

Based on an ethnographic study (Rodriguez Leon, 2020), this paper also aims to render visible the in-between-ness of child and social-material environment in a literacy event. The purpose of this paper, however, is to surface the child's idiosyncratic and subjectively produced experience in those dynamic relations. Accepting each of Burnett and Merchant's (2020b) propositions, this paper explores how neo-Vygotskian theories might contribute another dimension, offering further nuanced understandings of what unfolds when child, social others, text and other materials come together. By directing attention back to the individual child as they live through the relationality of the literacy event moment by moment, this paper proposes three novel ways to think about young children's encounters with text; first, the literacy event as a relational-idiosyncratic experience; second, the relational-subjective emergence of intention and orientation with text; and third, subjective-relational micromoments with text as sites of potential transformation in children's emerging understandings of literacies and of themselves as producers and consumers of text.

Neo-Vygotskian readings of subjectivity and the concept of perezhivanie

Whilst posthumanist perspectives foreground relationality, contemporary work advancing Vygotsky's (1994) concept of 'perezhivanie' underscore that a person's activity is constructed 'in-the-moment' through their awareness and perception of how the dynamic social and material relations affect them (Veresov & Fleer, 2016); multiple children participating in the same concrete literacy event experience it, act in it, and are affected in it differently (Bozhovich, 2009).

The concept of perezhivanie is said to be Vygotsky's 'unfinished' work. The closest translation of perezhivanie into English is 'lived through experience'. However, across the literature translations such as 'lived experience', 'emotional experience', 'affective experience', and 'inner experience' appear (Blunden, 2016).

In explaining the concept, Vygotsky (1994) used the metaphor of a refracting prism; it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience (*perezhivanie*). (p. 340)

The metaphor depicts *perezhivanie* as a person's unique prism, shaped by their lived experiences, through which an evolving event or situation is refracted, determining how it is subjectively perceived, whilst simultaneously reshaping the prism (Fleer, 2016; Mok, 2017; Veresov & Fleer, 2016). Hence, as González Rey (2017) states, 'Experiences are subjective productions rather than a reflection or assimilation of external facts, influences or objects' (p. 182).

Key to this paper is how the concept of *perezhivanie* captures the child and the socio-cultural-textual environment in unity, whilst simultaneously enabling the researcher to direct the analytic gaze to the individual child's experience. The concept prompts us to consider '*what*' is experienced and '*how*' it is experienced in unison. The metaphor renders visible the highly personal, idiosyncratic nature of a child's experience in a concrete literacy event, illustrating how multiple participants 'live through' the same event differently (e.g. Fleer, 2016; González Rey, 2012, 2016, 2017; Mok, 2017; Veresov & Fleer, 2016).

Of particular interest in the reported ethnography, was González Rey's (2012, 2017) writing on 'subjective senses and configurations'. According to González Rey, subjective senses are 'feelings', 'awareness', or 'sensations' of a situation, issue or phenomenon; in these 'cognitive-affective' senses, feeling evokes thought and thought evokes feeling, not in a cause-effect manner, but that both necessarily co-exist. Subjective senses are fluid, instantaneous and shape one's intuition and perception as a situation is lived; they originate at some point in the experience, yet are fluid and evolve in essence and nature. González Rey addresses the nexus of affect, cognition and emotion, proposing that subjective senses form dynamic networks of 'subjective configurations'.

Subjective configurations take shape through interpretation of one's subjective senses, as refracted through one's prism of *perezhivanie*; these evolving configurations organise one's understanding of a situation (i.e. the literacy event), the phenomenon more generally (i.e. the literacy practice) and of oneself in relation (i.e. one's literate identity). Whilst more stable than senses, subjective configurations are also malleable and continually in flow (González Rey, 2012). For the individual in the moment, the subjective configuration can give the illusion of an objective reality. Imagine a scenario in an early childhood setting, for example, in which a young child senses what might be defined as pride or gratification as they read aloud the words of a familiar picture storybook, perceiving the approval of their teacher and admiration of their peers. They form an understanding of what reading in this context entails, and simultaneously configure themselves as an accomplished reader. Moreover, this exemplifies how fragile and fluid that configuration of self, and of reading, might be.

From this perspective, as children journey through innumerable literacy events in early childhood, they are immersed in an ongoing process of configuring understandings of what literacy is, what different texts do, who participates, how literacy

works through different media and modes at different times and places; simultaneously they configure understandings of themselves as consumers and producers of text.

Bringing neo-Vygotskian thinking into dialogue with posthumanist perspectives of early childhood literacies, may offer a space to retain the relational ontology offered by more-than-human literacies, yet simultaneously redirect the lens to the individual in those relations. Through two brief exemplary vignettes and discussion, this paper explores how, first, children's encounters with texts might be thought of as relational-idiosyncratic experiences. Second, it proposes how human intention and orientation for activity emerge relationally and subjectively, and third, it muses with the idea of relational micromoments with text as sites of potential transformation.

Outline of the ethnography

The data re-presented are extracts from the author's ethnography (Rodriguez Leon, 2020) which explored young children's experiences of literacies through juxtaposing analysis of intentions, identities, and affective relations in literacy events. Over eight months, five 3- and 4-year-old children encountering text were video-recorded or documented in fieldnotes in home, community, and preschool spaces. Data were also generated from conversations with children, parents and preschool practitioners. The vignettes and analysis presented are the author's renderings of selected data; the first was the most fleeting, transient literacy event captured in the data set and the second was selected as the only data item which recorded two of the study's focal children engaged in sustained volitional play with a practitioner. The study was conducted in accordance with BERA (2018) ethical guidelines and ethical approval was granted by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee. In addition to institutional and parental consent, the study was explained to children verbally and in a specially designed pictorial consent form, which stressed that it was okay to ask the researcher to move away. Children's assent was also monitored on a moment-by-moment basis through verbal responses, body language and facial expression. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Vignette 1: Kawasaki

This fleeting literacy event was recorded as a field note. As Ben (aged 3 years 10 months) moved across the classroom with two other children, he noticed the home-made motorbike themed text open on the table. As his friends continued, Ben stopped, the researcher noticed, and the following encounter unfolded. For context, Ben's grandfather was an ex-motorcycle racer who occasionally took Ben and his brothers to watch races where they visited the 'enclosure' to meet the riders and see the motorbikes. Ben's father also had a Kawasaki motorbike which was kept in their garden.



Ben: *Look, that's Kawasaki.* [Gazing toward and pointing at the logographic print. Whilst said with excitement, his comment was not directed at anyone, but as the researcher moved closer, he made eye contact]

Researcher: *Oh, is it?*

Ben: *Yeah. That's a dirt bike.* [Said with an authoritative tone whilst nodding]

Researcher: *Okay, so what's a dirt bike?* [Gaze briefly to book, then to Ben]

Ben: [Hesitates] *Them race on the dirt track.* [Eye contact with researcher] Researcher: *Ah, can these all race on the dirt track?* [Gesturing toward the illustrations collectively]

Ben: [Looks more closely at each bike.] *Nahh – that's for the circuit* [pointing to the Suzuki] *but that* [tapping BMW image], *that* [tapping Yamaha image] *and that Kawasaki, them are dirt bikes.*

Ben looked up and continued across the classroom following his friends.

The literacy event as a relational–idiosyncratic experience

From a sociocultural lens, framed as a 'literacy event' the vignette could be construed as a manifestation of the cultural literacy practices of the preschool setting. Conceived of as 'literacy-as-event' (Burnett & Merchant, 2020b), it exemplifies a socio-material relational view. As Ben moved across the classroom with his friends, the text stopped him in his tracks, and so this brief episode could be thought of as an 'affective encounter' (Burnett & Merchant, 2018), a term the authors use to illustrate how happenings in relations between people and materials, 'interrupts a situation and by doing so, brings something new into play' (p. 64). Sight of the familiar 'Kawasaki' logo altered the course of Ben's activity.

From a relational stance, the text and Ben did not act independently of one another, rather the event unfolded as Ben 'moved with and through the text' (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 25). The unpredictability of this literacy event is apparent; it could have unfolded in a myriad of different ways. It was but happenstance, a twist of fate that all dimensions in this entanglement of human and non-human bodies converged at a certain moment in a certain way, unfolding as they did. It happened at a particular time, in a particular place as Ben moved across the classroom. Had he taken another route, the event would not have occurred.

Positioning the text as 'actant' (Latour, 2005) or a non-human body in the encounter prompts consideration of the text's composition. That is, an aggregate of materiality (i.e. black card of a significant size making the written text, images and logos stand out), modality (combination of logos, images, and large print) and subject matter (with personal significance), which together were a powerful force that impacted on Ben. Had the text been open on a different page, had it not included the familiar logo and images, or had the media been an iPad that had gone into sleep mode, Ben might have passed the text by without a second glance.

I (the researcher) too was entangled in the encounter; my interest, responses, actions; questions, and inferior motorbike knowledge affected relations, contributing to a space in which Ben expressed his knowledge, took up the mantel of 'expert', and enacted a position of authority on motorbike racing. It is worth considering hypothetically, how Ben

might have experienced the situation had the researcher been concerned with literacy assessment, for example, and had taken the opportunity to quiz Ben about the initial letter and sound of Kawasaki.

The relational, more-than-human way of knowing this literacy event embodies the idea of literacies emerging, fluidly and unpredictably in relations of human and non-human bodies. Yet, the concept of *perezhivanie* offers another dimension; it foregrounds the significance of Ben's lived experiences with Kawasaki motorbikes. Whether thought of as pre-personal and visceral affects (Ehret, 2017; Massumi, 2015; Thiel & Dernikos, 2020) or a flow of subjective senses (González Rey, 2012), Ben's unique prism of *perezhivanie* and the personal resonance evoked by the text were fundamental to the way this event unfolded. Viewed as Ben's personal, idiosyncratic experience, his flow of subjective senses could be thought of as a vehicle through which relations in the socio-textual environment shaped how he configured the event and configured himself in the event. As Bang (2009) argues, the child does not just experience a situation, they experience themselves as 'someone' in the situation. The relationality of this literacy event potentially moved Ben, potentially reshaping his prism of *perezhivanie*.

Coupling a posthumanist relational view of the literacy event with the concept of *perezhivanie* offers an alternative angle to consider how children's identities emerge with and through text. It may bring us closer to how the individual child affects and is affected in a literacy event, through which they configure their perception of the specific event and perception of themselves as a consumer and producer of text.

Whilst acknowledging that the researcher can never fully know a child's experience (what we produce will always be our own subjective configurations of a child's personal experience), embracing the relational and the idiosyncratic may be one way to ensure we do not lose sight of the individual in early childhood literacy research. Theoretical pluralism needn't reduce knowledge to binary or hierarchical perspectives, nor be a U-turn to anthropocentric ways of researching; rather it holds potential to enrich and expand our ways of knowing young children's encounters with text.

The second vignette further underscores the relational and idiosyncratic nature of a literacy event. It exemplifies how the flow of relations between multiple participants and texts are distinct experiences, through which intention and orientation for activity emerges.

Vignette 2: dinosaurs

This literacy event was video recorded, capturing a situation that unfolded during free flow play between two of the study's focal children, Elijah (3 years 4 months) and Amir (3 years 9 months), and the practitioner, Nikita. For context, when this data was gathered, Elijah was one of three children in the setting who were the foci of practitioners' observations for the week. The lead teacher had specifically asked staff to try to engage Elijah in conversation.

Elijah, with four model dinosaurs and a dinosaur themed textbook, approached Nikita requesting that she play with him. Having engaged in this play several times over the week, Elijah and Nikita shared an understanding that the purpose was to match model dinosaurs to illustrations in the book. Amir approached in a hurried manner and joined them.

Elijah selected one dinosaur as Nikita opened the book.

Nikita: *Is this him?* [Points to illustration, gaze to Elijah]

Elijah: *No*

Nikita: *Is this him?* [Turns page, re-positions book]

Elijah: *No* [Posture lifts, volume and intonation rise]

Nikita: *He's got a horn on his head, hasn't he?* [Pointing to the model in Elijah's hand]



Amir's presence has not yet been explicitly acknowledged. He sat up and began to comment, but as Nikita started to speak, he refrained.

Nikita: *Is this him?* [Pointing to image]

Elijah: *No*. [Stamping feet, smiling]

Nikita: *What's this one?* [Tapping page]

Amir: *A stegosaurus* [Said rapidly]

Nikita: [Gaze to Amir and nods] *A stegosaurus*.



Amir: *A [word inaudible] stegosaurus*. [Comment not acknowledged]

Nikita: *Is this him?* [To Elijah, pointing to illustration]

Elijah: *No*.

Nikita: *What's this one?*

Elijah: *T Rex* [Raised intonation, smiling]

Nikita: *A T-Rex* [Points to print]

Amir: *A T-Rex-aurus*

Nikita: [Gaze briefly to Amir and laughs] *A T-Rex-aurus!*

Nikita: *What about this one, all-o-sau-rus* [Points to print whilst phonetically sounding out the letters]

Nikita: *Is that right?* [Asking Elijah]

Elijah didn't respond, but closely examined his model, visually and with his fingertips.



The interaction continued in a similar manner for 60 s. As Nikita turned the page again, Elijah gasped, sat up right, then quickly placed his model on top of the illustration.

Elijah: *Look, there*. [Excited and with urgency]

Nikita: *It's the same as this one, that's right*.

Elijah: *Found him*. [Lifting up the model then placing it on the corresponding image]

Having found the corresponding dinosaur, both Elijah and Nikita cheered. Amir watched closely, then suddenly got up, rushing to a nearby box containing model dinosaurs. Meanwhile the interaction continued between Elijah and Nikita.



Amir returned holding a model dinosaur.

Amir: *This is the same as the one before*. [To Nikita, holding up his model]

Amir placed his model on the page. Elijah, who was studying the page pushed it to one side. Nikita retrieved the model and handed it back to Amir whilst continuing her conversation with Elijah.



The relational-subjective emergence of intention and orientation

The vignette portrays what occurred when an adult, children, model dinosaurs and a multimodal text came together at a particular place and time; moreover, it renders visible how dynamic relations between each individual child, social others, materials and text unfolded very differently for Elijah and Amir. Whilst it was a shared social-material-spatial-temporal event, what emerged, and how it emerged was uniquely experienced by each child. Posthumanist perspectives surface how human intentions are not fixed, the event pre-exists intentionality, or put the other way around, intentionality emerges through the event (Burnett & Merchant, 2020a; Hackett, MacLure, & McMahon, 2020). I use the term intention here with some degree of caution as definitions of intentionalism differ, and the extent to which intentionality is viewed as conscious or preconscious has been an area of debate, for example, see Leys (2011) and Connolly (2011). However, directing the analytic lens toward observable indicators of the individual child's fluid subjective senses and configurations offers a conceptual space to muse over how intention, action and participation are relationally orientated as happenings are subjectively perceived through the individual's prism of *perezhivanie*.

Both Amir and Elijah participated volitionally, and both brought with them established knowledge and understandings of dinosaurs, of the physical environment, and of the social and cultural situation, amongst other things. Yet arguably, they arrived at the event with distinct intentions and orientations upon which to structure their participation, which for Amir particularly, appeared to shift and turn in the flow of relations. From the outset, both children appeared to be configuring understandings of what the activity involved and how they could or should participate. Elijah's configuration of the event was seemingly more stable, whilst for Amir, it required some 'figuring out'. Yet for both, their actions and behaviours were orientated by subjective senses evoked in significant micromoments of relations.

As explained, due to the setting's observation schedule, Nikita's attention was predominantly focused on Elijah. On occasions, she recognised and legitimised his dinosaur

expertise by, for example, asking him whether her pronunciation of ‘allosaurus’ was correct. She enthusiastically celebrated when he matched a dinosaur, affirming his understanding of the purpose of the activity. The spatial arrangements meant that Elijah was in close proximity to the book and several model dinosaurs were gathered close beside the upturned basket upon which he sat. In terms of realising his original intentions and goals in the activity, there was coherence between Elijah, Nikita, the text and the models, meaning that little assertion was required on his part. The demands Elijah placed on others met little resistance; even his removal of Amir’s model from the page, in an environment in which sharing and collaboration are promoted, went unchallenged. Nikita seemed ‘in tune’ with Elijah and orientated herself toward his intent and activity, albeit with her own distinct motives. Whilst there was notable intensity in many of Elijah’s verbal and embodied responses, there was, by and large, harmony in relations between Elijah, and other human and non-human bodies.

Amir appeared intent on generating a more central, or inclusive role in the event. He seemed highly alert, sensing happenings, and recursively perceiving and configuring what was valued in this particular interaction, such as dinosaur knowledge or possession of a model. These configurations, arguably, orientated his actions and behaviours in his quest for a more inclusive position. For example, when an opportunity arose Amir seized the moment, interjecting his dinosaur knowledge; yet his efforts did not secure him greater inclusion in the event. On witnessing the cheering at the dinosaur match, he re-interpreted the ‘rules of engagement’, and perceiving the value of possessing a dinosaur, he acted to procure one. However, his model was brushed away and his comments went unanswered. During the few minutes of this episode (and this was not typical of his experiences at the preschool), while in close proximity to the action spatially, Amir remained on the periphery of the social interaction. For Amir, there was discord in relations between himself and other human and non-human bodies, meaning that his intention and orientation for activity shifted and turned.

As the researcher re-viewing this video data many times, I found myself growing frustrated, and wondering why Amir’s flow of subjective senses did not appear to be evoking anger, upset, or frustration. I wondered why he did not assert his presence more strongly, or raise his voice; simultaneously, I felt it admirable that he just kept calmly working at being involved. So whilst Amir’s intention and activity emerged with the relationality of the event, he was also affected by his personal prism of *perezhivanie*, shaping and guiding his behaviours. Reading these data from both posthumanist and neo-Vygotskian perspectives may offer more layered insights into children’s actions and behaviours in a literacy event, and how intention and orientation emerge both relationally and subjectively.

Micromoments with text as sites of potential transformation

The third proposition to surface through the ethnography’s theoretical stance is that subjectively perceived relational micromoments with text can be thought of as sites of potential transformation for young children. The grand challenge of understanding how young children become literate continues worldwide. Yet children’s learning cannot be studied directly, what can be observed is their activity, and inferences made about their learning (Hedegaard, 2020). Many educational systems rely on children’s attainment of

predetermined outcomes as evidence of ‘what works’ in literacy instruction. In contrast, sociocultural scholars might advocate directing attention to children’s ‘changing participation’ (Rogoff, 2003) in cultural literacy practices and how ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) enables children to progress from novice to more advanced levels of literacy practices. Bozhovich (2009) offers another perspective, arguing that understanding children’s learning through, ‘the nature of their affective relationship to the environment’ (p. 66), exposes which aspects of the learning environment bear influence for an individual child at a particular time.

The relational-subjective-idiosyncratic stance adopted here may have some potential to steer thinking to how micromoments with text might be sites of potential transformation in a child’s literacies. Discussing Vygotsky’s (1998) work on ‘developmental crises’, Flear (2015) comments that Vygotsky argued, ‘that both the unremarkable everyday microscopic movements and the abrupt and dynamic crises each contribute to a child’s development’ (p. 24). In both vignettes, such micromoments are discernible. At times, there appeared to be moments of ‘harmony’ in relations, when children’s emerging subjective senses aligned with and consolidated their configurations, maintaining their status quo. There were also moments of discord, evoking subjective senses that challenged or antagonised an existing understanding.

In Vignette 2, for example, whilst all seemed ‘in tune’ for Elijah, Amir’s orientation toward inclusion meant that the way in which he sensed and configured the event went through cycles of figuring out, acting, and evaluating. On the one hand, the vignette suggests that these micromoments of ‘harmony’ engendered a more auspicious experience for Elijah, however, this data extract was selected because it exemplifies how relationality and subjectivity in the concrete event involved a distinct experience for each child. What I am proposing is a flexible, non-binary view of moments of discord and harmony, without positive/negative connotation. Relational micromoments in everyday literacy events are oftentimes subtle and fluid, and they vary in personal significance and intensity; they may evoke a sensation something akin to excitement, intrigue or perplexity, for example (whilst being cautious of reducing the experience of these senses to words). What I propose is that a child subjectively perceives relational micromoments in a way that, to varying degrees, affirms, disrupts, or in some other less definable way, reconfigures their way of knowing the literacy event in progress, other literacies and life events, their world view and their self-perception at that particular time.

For example, Ben potentially felt moments of discord in the unexpectedness of the researcher’s response and questions. Yet, almost simultaneously micromoments of harmony flowed as the logos and illustrations aligned with Ben’s existing knowledge and experience of motorbikes. In this reading of the data, in the flurry and flow of subjective senses, Ben configured an understanding of the situation and orientated his activity, he expressed his superior knowledge and enacted a confident and authoritative position. Each and every micromoment in relationality may be a site of potential transformation, because if subjectively perceived as significant for a particular child at a particular time, it has the potential to reshape their personal prism of *perezhivanie*.

Thinking of children’s micromoments with text as potential sites of transformation may offer an alternative and fuller view of early literacy development. From this perspective learning cannot be reduced to skills and knowledge. Rather, this perspective surfaces the ways in which young children’s meaning making, identity making and relationship

making through and with text unfolds relationally and subjectively in human and non-human entanglements. Understandings of young children ‘doing/being/knowing’ literacies (Kuby, 2017, p. 878) become inseparable from understandings of how they are moved and affected in their encounters with text.

Conclusion

Both cultural-historical theories and posthumanism have brought about exponential advances in the study of early childhood literacies. Kuby and Rowsell (2017) make the salient point that one cannot easily apply posthumanist theories to conventional humanist literacy research. Mindful of this point, as an early childhood teacher turned academic researcher, I have attempted to step into a relational ontology, to study the in-betweenness of literacy events involving young children, however, I have done so in my quest to know individual children as consumers and producers of literacies more fully. In both research and practice, it is vital that we do not lose sight of the individual; the reported ethnography has foregrounded five children’s relational and idiosyncratic struggles for meaning, inclusion and recognition with and through text. It has surfaced the fluidity and unpredictability of a literacy event and in unison, has offered one way to consider how and why an encounter with text affects an individual child in a particular way.

Three propositions have been presented in this paper; first, a literacy event can be thought of as a relational–idiosyncratic experience for each child. This idea invites us to ponder how the event both unfolds in the moment, yet the experience is rooted in, but not bounded by, the child’s *perezhivanie*. Second, children’s intention and orientation with text emerge relationally and subjectively. Data presented expose the ways in which human intention and agency are distributed, shifting and turning in the flow of the event; simultaneously, they demonstrate how each child’s prism of *perezhivanie* shapes what matters to them, how they sense conditions around them, and how they perceive they could or should participate in the unfolding event. Third, relational micromoments with text can be thought of as sites of potential transformation. This idea reminds us that each encounter with text leaves a residue that travels with the child to subsequent encounters, that shapes how they know literacy and how they configure themselves as producers and consumers of text.

The propositions made in this paper are abstract and highly conceptual, although not without relevance to policy and practice. They echo previous demands to adopt broader visions of literacies and learning in early education, and they support calls for policy makers and practitioners to be mindful of the multiple and diverse potential impacts of curricula, pedagogy and classroom practices on individual children. There is an urgent need to consider how interpersonal interactions, alongside the texts and materials that children encounter in the classroom generate opportunities for literacies in which our youngest citizens can subjectively configure themselves as legitimate readers and writers. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the body of academic work that vigorously challenge deficit views of young children’s literacy capabilities. As evidenced in the vignettes, children’s engagement with text is so much more than an educational venture, it is an integral part of their everyday lives through which they creatively and innovatively make meaning, make relationships and make identities.

There are multiple perspectives from which to research and know young children's literacies, different theories provide different tools through which we can make sense of what we observe and experience. These theories are not fixed constructs or abstract truths, they both shape and are shaped by researchers' thinking. The conceptual space generated in this paper aims to make the individual child visible, and it may support us in knowing the stories of the children whom we serve and study. We owe it to them to connect, to see them, to hear them, to feel what they experience, and only then, to advocate for what is in their best interests. The ideas presented in this paper facilitate ways of knowing early literacies that foreground the individuality of young children learning and living with text.

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